

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for sharing electronic content, the method comprising:

enabling access to a buddy list user interface that makes perceivable user-identified online identities and real time presence information for at least some of those online identities;

5 based on user manipulation of the buddy list user interface, enabling designation of several online identities that constitute a subset of the online identities for whom presence is indicated within the buddy list;

receiving from the user an indication of content to be shared with each of the online identities designated;

10 establishing separate communications with each of the online identities designated by the user; and

communicating content on behalf of the user independently to each of the online identities designated by the user.

15 2. The method of claim 1 wherein communicating independently includes establishing a separate instant messaging session between the user and each of the online participants.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein responses received from each online participant are not viewable by the other online participants.

20 4. The method of claim 1 wherein the content specified by the user is made available to each of the designated online participants.

25 5. The method of claim 1 wherein designating includes selecting particular online identities using a mouse pointer.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein designation of several online identities is a manual process performed by a user.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the manual process involves manual selection of each online identity individually, using a pointing device.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein the content to be shared is a calendar event.

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9. The method of claim 8 wherein the calendar event is dropped onto a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list to inspire communication of the calendar event, or a corresponding invitation, to each of the designated online identifies separately.

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10. The method of claim 8 wherein a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list is dropped onto the calendar event to inspire communication of the calendar event, or a corresponding invitation, to each of the designated online identifies separately.

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11. The method of claim 1 wherein the content to be shared is dropped onto a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list to inspire communication of the content to each of the designated online identities separately.

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12. The method of claim 1 wherein a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list is dropped onto the content to be shared to inspire communication of the content to each of the designated online identities separately.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein communicating the content to each of the online identities designated by the user comprises:

determining which of the designated online identities are presently online;

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communicating the content to the designated online identities that are presently online using instant messaging; and

communicating the content to the designated online identities that are not presently online using a communications program other than instant messaging.

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14. The method of claim 13 wherein electronic mail is the communications program used to communicate the content to the designated online identities that are not presently online.

15. The method of claim 13 wherein instant messages are used to communicate the content, wherein delivery of the instant messages is delayed until the designated online identities that are not presently online to the designated online identities that are not presently online are again online.

16. The method of claim 13 further comprising providing the user with options to communicate the content to the designated online identities that are not presently online using a communications program other than instant messaging.

17. The method of claim 1 wherein communicating the content to each of the designated online identities comprises:

resolving a cascaded delivery rule for each of the designated online identities to choose a delivery mechanism for communicating the content to each of the designated online identities; and

using each of the chosen delivery mechanisms to communicate the content to the corresponding designated online identity.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein a delivery rule is specified for each of the designated online identities by each of the designated online identities.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein the user specifies a delivery rule for each of the designated online identities.

20. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving the indication of the content to be shared with each of the designated online identities occurs before designation of the online identities.

21. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving the indication of the content to be shared with each of the designated online identities occurs after designation of the online identities.

22. A computer system for sharing electronic content, the computer system comprising:
an access module configured to enable access to a buddy list user interface that makes
perceivable user-identified online identities and real time presence information for at least
some of those online identities;

5 a user designation module configured to enable designation of several online
identities that constitute a subset of the online identities for whom presence is indicated
within the buddy list based on user manipulation of the buddy list user interface;

a content selection module configured to receive from the user an indication of
content to be shared with each of the designated online identities;

10 a communications establishing module configured to establish separate
communications with each of the online identities designated by the user; and

a communications module configured to communicate content on behalf of the user
independently to each of the online identities designated by the user.

15 23. The computer system of claim 22 wherein communicating independently includes
establishing a separate instant messaging session between the user and each of the online
participants.

20 24. The computer system of claim 22 wherein responses received from each online
participant are not viewable by the other online participants.

25 25. The computer system of claim 22 wherein the content specified by the user is made
available to each of the designated online participants.

26. The computer system of claim 22 wherein designating includes selecting particular
online identities using a mouse pointer.

27. The computer system of claim 22 wherein designation of several online identities is a
manual process performed by a user.

28. The computer system of claim 27 wherein the manual process involves manual selection of each online identity individually, using a pointing device.

29. The computer system of claim 22 wherein the content to be shared is a calendar event.

30. The computer system of claim 29 wherein the calendar event is dropped onto a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list to inspire communication of the calendar event, or a corresponding invitation, to each of the designated online identifies separately.

31. The computer system of claim 29 wherein a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list are dropped onto the calendar event to inspire communication of the calendar event, or a corresponding invitation, to each of the designated online identifies separately.

32. The computer system of claim 22 wherein the content to be shared is dropped onto a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list to inspire communication of the content to each of the designated online identities separately.

33. The computer system of claim 22 wherein a representation of the designated online identities in the buddy list is dropped onto the content to be shared to inspire communication of the content to each of the designated online identities separately.

34. The computer system of claim 22 wherein communicating the content to each of the online identities designated by the user comprises:
determining which of the designated online identities are presently online;
communicating the content to the designated online identities that are presently online using instant messaging; and
communicating the content to the designated online identities that are not presently online using a communications program other than instant messaging.

35. The computer system of claim 34 wherein electronic mail is the communications program used to communicate the content to the designated online identities that are not presently online.

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36. The computer system of claim 34 wherein instant messages are used to communicate the content, wherein delivery of the instant messages is delayed until the designated online identities that are not presently online to the designated online identities that are not presently online are again online.

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37. The computer system of claim 34 further comprising a delivery options module configured to provide the user with options to communicate the content to the designated online identities that are not presently online using a communications program other than instant messaging.

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38. The computer system of claim 22 wherein communicating the content to each of the designated online identities comprises:

resolving a cascaded delivery rule for each of the designated online identities to choose a delivery mechanism for communicating the content to each of the designated online identities; and

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using each of the chosen delivery mechanisms to communicate the corresponding designated online identity.

39. The computer system of claim 38 wherein a delivery rule is specified for each of the designated online identities by each of the designated online identities.

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40. The computer system of claim 38 wherein the user specifies a delivery rule for each of the designated online identities.

41. The computer system of claim 22 wherein receiving the indication of the content to be shared with each of the designated online identities occurs before designation of the online identities.

5 42. The computer system of claim 22 wherein receiving the indication of the content to be shared with each of the designated online identities occurs after designation of the online identities.

43. An apparatus for sharing electronic content, the apparatus comprising:
 10 access means for enabling access to a buddy list user interface that makes perceivable user-identified online identities real time presence information for at least some of those online identities;
 user designation means for enabling designation of several online identities that constitute a subset of the online identities for whom presence is indicated within the buddy
 15 list based on user manipulation of the buddy list interface;
 content selection means receiving from the user an indication of content to be shared with each of the designated online identities;
 communications establishing means for establishing separate communications with each of the online identities designated by the user; and
 20 communications means for communicating content on behalf of the user independently to each of the online identities designated by the user.

44. A method of sharing electronic content, the method comprising:
 enabling user generation of application-specific, sharable electronic content;
 25 receiving user selection of a first instant messaging entity and a second instant messaging entity;
 generating a single message that includes the application-specific, shareable electronic content and that is to be associated with the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity;
 30 enabling the user to send the message using an instant messaging platform that is sent concurrently to the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity; and

mediating responses received from the first and the second instant messaging entities.

45. The method of claim 44 wherein the electronic content is a calendar event from a calendar application; and

5 recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity comprises recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees to the calendar event.

46. The method of claim 45 further comprising generating, by the calendar application,
10 an invitation to the calendar event for the first instant messaging entity.

47. The method of claim 45 wherein the message is an invitation to the calendar event.

48. The method of claim 47 wherein enabling the user to send the message comprises
15 enabling the user to send the invitation from the calendar application to an instant messaging server.

49. The method of claim 47 wherein enabling the user to send the message comprises:
enabling the user to send the invitation to a communications application; and
20 allowing the communications application to deliver the invitation to the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity.

50. The method of claim 49 wherein the communications application is an instant
25 messaging application.

51. The method of claim 45 further comprising inviting automatically, in response to recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees, the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity to the calendar event using instant messages.

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52. The method of claim 51 wherein automatically inviting comprises sending an invitation to the calendar event to the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity using instant messages.

5 53. The method of claim 45 wherein recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees is performed in response to a user dragging the calendar event from the calendar application to a representation of the first instant messaging entity and a representation of the second instant messaging entity.

10 54. The method of claim 45 wherein recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees is performed in response to a user entering the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity into the calendar event.

15 55. The method of claim 45 wherein recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees is performed in response to a user selecting the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity from a list of potential instant messaging entities, the list being generated by the calendar application.

20 56. The method of claim 45 wherein:
recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees is performed in response to a user dragging and dropping a block of time from the calendar application to a representation of the first instant messaging entity and a representation of the second instant messaging entity, and
enabling user generation of electronic content comprises providing the calendar
25 event, in which the user may generate electronic content, the calendar event being provided in response to the dragging and dropping, with the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees.

30 57. The method of claim 45 wherein:
recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity as invitees is performed in response to a user selecting a feature associated with the first instant

messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity, the feature automatically inviting the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity to the calendar event.

5 58. The method of claim 44 wherein recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity is performed in response to the user dragging a representation of the first instant messaging entity and a representation of the second instant messaging entity to a representation of the electronic content.

10 59. The method of claim 44 wherein recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity is performed in response to the user dragging a representation of the electronic content to a representation of the first instant messaging entity and a representation of the second instant messaging entity.

15 60. The method of claim 44 wherein the first instant messaging entity or the second instant messaging entity represents an individual user of an instant messaging system.

61. The method of claim 44 wherein the first instant messaging entity or the second instant messaging entity represents multiple users of an instant messaging system.

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62. The method of claim 44 wherein the first instant messaging entity or the second instant messaging entity is listed in a buddy list.

63. The method of claim 44 wherein recognizing the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity occurs before enabling user generation of the electronic content.

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64. The method of claim 44 wherein the message is an instant message that may be sent to multiple instant messaging entities at substantially the same time.

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65. The method of claim 44 further comprising:

modifying the electronic content as indicated in the response to produce modified electronic content;

generating a new message including the modified electronic content, the new message being associated with the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity; and

enabling the user to send the new message as an instant message to the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity using the application.

66. A method of sharing electronic content, the method comprising:

enabling access to user designation of contacts for whom presence is maintained;

enabling user selection of one or more of the contacts;

recognizing user selection of a first contact and a second contact from the contacts;

accessing an electronic message associated electronically with the first contact and the second contact as recipients; and

sending the electronic message to each of the first contact and the second contact using an instant messaging system.

67. The method of claim 66 wherein sending the electronic message is in response to a single user instruction.

68. The method of claim 66 wherein enabling user description, enabling user selection, recognizing user selection, accessing the electronic message, and sending the electronic message are each performed by an instant messaging application.

69. The method of claim 68 wherein:

the electronic message comprises an invitation to a calendar event,

accessing the electronic message comprises accessing the invitation, and

sending the electronic message comprises sending the invitation.

70. An apparatus comprising a computer readable medium having instructions stored thereon that when executed by a machine result in at least the following:

enabling access to user designation of contacts for whom presence is maintained;
enabling user selection of one or more of the contacts;
recognizing user selection of a first contact and a second contact from the contacts;
accessing an electronic message associated electronically with the first contact and
5 the second contact as recipients; and
sending the electronic message to each of the first contact and the second contact
using an instant messaging system.

71. An apparatus comprising a computer readable medium having instructions stored
10 thereon that when executed by a machine result in at least the following:

enabling user generation by an application of electronic content to be shared with at
least a first recipient and a second recipient using an instant messaging system;

recognizing by the application user selection of a first instant messaging entity as the
first recipient and a second instant messaging entity as the second recipient;

15 generating a message including the electronic content, the message being associated
with the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity;

enabling the user to send the message as an instant message that is sent concurrently
to the first instant messaging entity and the second instant messaging entity using the
application; and

20 receiving a response to the message from the first instant messaging entity that is not
sent to the second instant messaging entity or from the second instant messaging entity that is
not sent to the first instant messaging entity.